

AGAINST THE GRAIN

OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO WORKERS' ORGANIZATION

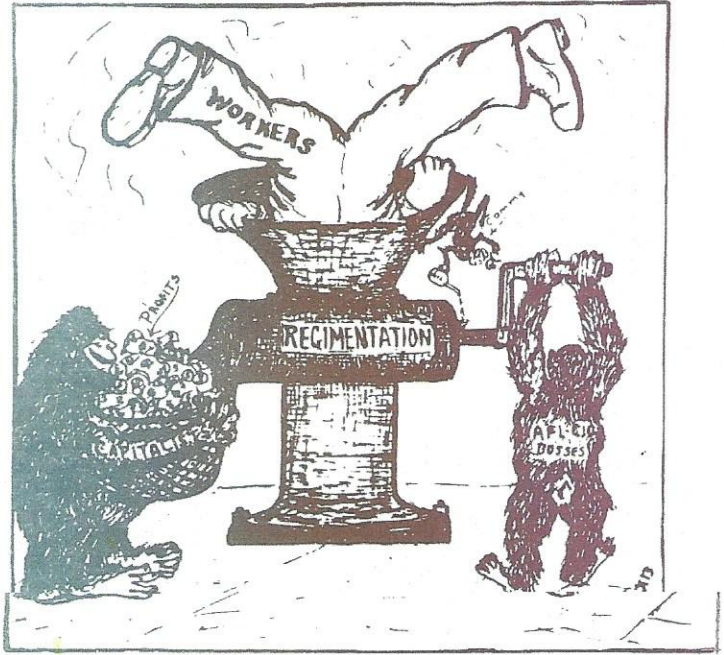
MAY DAY

No. 1, MAY, 1976/15



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- I. We are a group of workers coming from such industries and workplaces as the taxi industry, hospitals, factories, education, publishing, government work, social services, etc.

Though we are a very diverse group, we all agree that the present attack against the working class as a whole cannot be met with old solutions. We have seen the failure of liberal and trade union efforts which have misled workers into the belief that the present capitalist system is capable of meeting the crisis. What is happening in New York has clearly demonstrated the failure of traditional reformist solutions. The capitulation and virtual collapse of New York's trade union movement (the so-called "progressive" union leaders like Victor Gotbaum and Leon Davis, as well as the Shakers) is clear-cut evidence of such bankruptcy.

At the same time, we have also seen the impotence and rigidity of authoritarian "vanguard socialist" parties or sects to cope with twentieth century capitalism and the needs of the American people.

- II. As an alternative to these bankrupt policies and methods, we believe that the working class itself must generate new forms of organization and struggle free from authoritarian control from above. Unless we as workers take hold of our own organizations and direct our struggle from below, it is not possible to defeat the onslaught against our living standards and hard-won working conditions (ie: pension and health benefits; job equality in the hiring and upgrading of Black, Hispanic, and women workers; health and safety conditions in shops and offices without speedup; etc.).

As socialists, we understand that neither defensive struggles nor reform programs are sufficient to secure the liberation of workers and other oppressed people from crises, wars and the deterioration of everyday life. Our task is to link everyday struggle with a vision of a socialist society in which we as producers control our own labor and enjoy the freedom to establish social and personal relations on the basis of equality rather than domination and hierarchy. We do not want to exchange one set of masters for another. Those who profess a socialist politics but who practice methods of work and offer a vision which reproduces rather than opposes the prevailing order are destined to turn off working people from seeking alternatives to the present system of capitalist power.

While we aim to build a unified working class movement for socialism, we recognize that many sectors of the working class - such as Blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, Native-Americans, women, gays, etc. - have built their own organizations and movements to achieve their aims. We stand in solidarity with these sectors of the working class who suffer double oppression, both as workers and as oppressed minorities. We hope to develop close relationships with these groups and share our views with them, especially the idea that the ideals of freedom and equality cannot be achieved within the capitalist system.

We seek to form an alternative to vanguard groups who have seized the political initiative at many workplaces. In some cases, these groups have performed well, offering militant and effective leadership to workers repelled by the capitulation of the trade unions and professional administrators.

We will cooperate with any group which participates in the daily struggles of workers on specific actions or in broader coalitions as long as they remain constructive. But we are aware that vanguard socialist groups which harbor the aspiration to seize control of the unions, or to achieve hegemony at the workplace in order to foster their often hierarchical and authoritarian politics, are obstacles to the workers struggle and to the socialist movement.

We need forms of organization that actively present libertarian socialist views concerning the immediate issues facing workers and the need to go beyond current perspectives.

- III. Right now we are isolated, we lack effective forms of communication with each other and with other workers, and have only tenuous contacts with similar groups in other industries or sectors of the economy. Since we do not have the built-in support and communication system of the various sect parties, we are unable to learn from each other's successes or failures or to support one another's struggles materially and psychologically.

We consider it a matter of urgency to begin to facilitate, among people of our political and human outlook, the interchange of such information, experiences, mutual aid, etc. We see this as a critical step toward building, in the future, organizational forms which can unite us into an association of workplace committees or councils.

For the immediate future we propose:

1. A meeting of interested workers to discuss the above statement of principles and its possible practical applications, such as the following two specific proposals...
2. The creation of a newspaper to facilitate the interchange of ideas and experiences arising from our day-to-day struggles within our various industries and work-places.
3. The planning of public meetings and forums to broaden the base of our operations and support, to establish links among various industries, and to focus on specific problems facing the working people of New York City.

10/24/75

NEW GRASS ROOTS PAPER IS BORN

This is the first issue of a newspaper dealing with the experiences, struggles and lives of New York's rank and file groups in various industries. Our immediate purpose is to establish communication between these small and often isolated groups, so that we can more effectively understand and support one another's daily struggles for jobs, decent salaries and living con-

ditions. Our long-range perspective is, however, that only libertarian socialism offers viable and democratic alternatives to our present exploitive system. (See editorial on page 2). We welcome comments, criticisms and articles for future issues, and invite anyone who wishes to become a part of this paper to call Ezra Birnbaum (866-6996).

#1 MAY 1976

EDITORIAL—"AGAINST THE GRAIN"

During January and February, more than forty socialists and militants active in rank-and-file and workplace struggles met to figure out how to connect up isolated efforts in different unions, industries, and government agencies, and to figure out how to give each other support.

This newspaper, a forum series, and a study group are our first efforts. Our long view is to create a socialist society run by and for workers—blue collar and white collar—who produce the goods and provide the services. To do this, we need to push out of power the capitalists and their corporate managers who now own, control, run and profit from the present system. As part of this transformation we hope to build struggles for workers self-management and for an association of workplace committees or councils.

We are faced with new economic and political developments of permanent high unemployment, slashed city services, and attacks on our living standards and hard-won working conditions. Our unions respond by forcing us to accept the Carey-Beame-Bankers giveaway of wages and pensions. The unions then turn around and rip-off government CETA money from long-unemployed women, Blacks and Puerto Ricans, playing the old game of setting Black vs. white, employed vs. unemployed, men vs. women. The whole package is sold to us by saying, "Hold tight—every recession is followed by the good times—capitalism still works."

The collapse of the unions is matched by the failure of the vanguard socialist parties. In some cases, the leadership of the parties become part and parcel of the sell-out union bureaucracies. Whether they do so or not, they all discourage new forms of daily struggle and organization by attempting to impose their own political line. Neither approach puts the main emphasis where it should be—organizing fights from below, in the shops and offices, around workers immediate demands coupled with a socialist program.

Our view is that a struggle against capitalism and for socialism must also incorporate within it a social revolution against domination and elitist bureaucracy.

We say in our political statement that...

"Our task is to link everyday struggles with a vision of a so-

cialist society in which we as producers control our own labor and enjoy the freedom to establish social and personal relations on the basis of equality rather than domination and hierarchy. *We do not want to exchange one set of masters for another.*" (underlining ours)

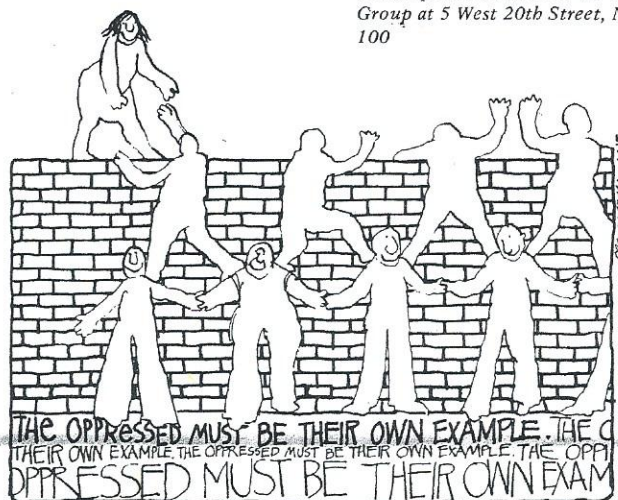
The statement also stresses that...

"While we aim to build a unified working class movement for socialism, we recognize that many sectors of the working class—such as Blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, Native-Americans, Women, and Gays—have built their own organizations and movements to achieve their aims. We stand in solidarity with these sectors of the working class who suffer double oppression, both as workers and as oppressed groups. We hope to develop close

The "WORK PLACE ORGANIZING GROUP" (a temporary name), has two working committees at this point... the Newspaper Committee and the Forums and Study Groups Committee. We held General Assembly meetings on December 14 and January 18. These periodic meetings set over-all policy.

Turning this city and country around and building a strong workers movement for a non-authoritarian socialist society will need everyone's participation (except those who benefit from things the way they are, of course). We need your help, criticisms and spirit to make this newspaper a success. We need your news reports from your shop, office, community... news about cultural doings, sports, humor, graphics, etc.

For information about committee meetings, to obtain a copy of the political statement, to send us news reports, contact the WPO Group at 5 West 20th Street, NYC 100



relationships with these groups and share our views with them, especially the idea that the ideals of freedom and equality cannot be achieved within the capitalist system."

The group also agreed on an anti-sectarian plank which seeks to "... cooperate with any group which participates in the daily struggles of workers on specific actions or in broader coalitions as long as they remain constructive." The statement continues by warning that vanguard socialist groups which aim to seize control of the unions in order to control the workers are obstacles to the socialist movement.

Words That Live

... The anarchist represents the viewpoint that the struggle against capitalism must at the same time be a struggle against coercive institutions of political power, for in history economic exploitation has always gone hand-in-hand with political and social oppression. The exploitation, of man by man, and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other.

—Rudolf Rocker